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POCAHONTAS COUNTY

Chapter 6 - Section 1

The first Presbyterian minister of whom we have any record in these "western" settlements was Rev. Ben Edward Crawford. Mr. Crawford is supposed to have come from the "South Branch" (of the Potomac) , and he must have visited this region soon after the first permanent settlements were made. Other names connected with that early period are Frazier and Read. These are referred to as missionaries, but it is not possible to determine by whom they were sent or how long they remained. It is, however, said of Mr. Crawford, and the statement is probably true, that he was the first Christian minister of any denomination who visited these "western waters".

The labors of these pioneer ministers, whose names are dimmed by distance, were not without results. Of their ministry Dr. McElhenny wrote in 1858: "Until within comparatively a few years persons were living both in this county (Greenbrier) and Monroe who professed conversions under the ministry of these men, and from my long acquaintance with them I can say I have never met with any who manifested more of the life and true spirit of piety than they did. Some of them for sixty years and others of them for seventy years were truly burning and shining lights in the church".

The first Presbyterian minister to settle within the extensive territory embraced by the original Greenbrier Presbytery was Rev. John McCue. Mr. McCue was licensed to preach by Hanover Presbytery meeting in Timber Ridge Church, Rockbridge Co.,

Virginia, May 22, 1782, and was instructed by that Presbytery to labor for a portion of his time in Greenbrier County. His ordination sermon was preached a year later on May 20, 1783, in Monmouth Church near Lexington, and the ordination service was arranged for the first Wednesday of the August following among the people of the region west of the Alleghenies, where he had spent his previous year as an evangelist.

Mr. McCue was a man of fine breeding, good preparation for his work and of unusual natural ~~noturel~~ ability. His friend Thomas Jefferson at one time in his youth urged him to give up the work of the ministry and devote his unusual talents to the study of the law. His ministry continued for nine years and four months, terminating September 20, 1791.

Mr. McCue's ministry is of great importance, not only because he was the first Presbyterian minister to be settled in this region but also because of the great work he initiated, both in the organization of churches and in his wider missionary activities. One historian says, "He was probably the first to administer the sealing ordinances in "The Sinks" in Monroe, "The Levels" and "The Head of Greenbrier" in Pocahontas County and in Tygart's Valley.

About the year 1818 other ministers began to visit this region as evangelists or stated supplies of churches recently organized. Dr. McElhenny mentions especially Rev. Messrs. S. L. Graham, James Kerr, William G. Campbell, and Joseph Brown.

The work of two of the above named men especially deser-

ves mention, namely, Rev. William G. Campbell and Rev. Joseph Brown. Mr. Campbell preached frequently in Monroe, Fayette, Nicholas and Pocahontas Counties. He received one hundred members at the Anthony's Creek Church, eighty-seven at Spring Creek, and twenty-nine at Oak Grove, and many others at churches which he visited occasionally. Rev. Joseph Brown was one or the youngest sons of Mary Moore of Abb's Valley. He is remembered especially in this county for his work at Oak Grove, Huntersville and Liberty Churches.

At the time when other ministers were beginning to come out to join Dr. McElhenny as this frontier field began to develop, about the year 1818, another minister who was to exert f far-flung and lasting influence in the northern part of the Greenbrier Presbytery was beginning his labors in the Tygart's Valley region. Rev. Aretas Loomis came out to the Tygart's V Valley field in the summer of 1818, continuing there for a number of years. Others who had come out as missionaries had labored for brief periods of time in that section, but it remained for Mr. Loomis to offer the people that constructive leadership which makes his ministry a notable one in the history of our Presbytery.

From The Church on the Western Waters
(An History of Greenbrier Presbytery
and its Churches)
by; Dr. LLoyd McF. Courtney

Chapter 6 -- Section 1

Of the Rev. Aretas Loomis' visits to Clover Lick with Mrs. Jacob Warwick, we have the following account from the History of Pocahontas County by Dr. Wm. T. Price.

Mrs. Jacob Warwick was eminently pious and was a member of the Windy Cove Presbyterian Church. She never felt herself more honored than when ministers would visit her home and preach. The visiting minister would receive a nice horse or something else as valuable, as a token of appreciation. She was conscientiously rigid in her domestic discipline. Her brother once made this remark, "Mary, I used to think you were too strict with your family, and you have been blamed for it. I see now you are right. You have not a child but would kneel in the dust to obey you. I let my children have more liberties, and they do not care so much for me".

The Rev. Aretas Loomis came from Beverly for a time every four weeks and preached at the Warwick residence. She was highly emotional, and during the services often appeared v very happy. She was very benevolent and her kind deeds were done upon the principle of not telling her left hand what the right hand be doing. Persons in her employ would always be overpaid.

It should be remembered that Mrs. Warwick in her old age gathered the first Sabbath School ever taught in Pocahontas County. In the summer her servants would lift her on her horse, and she would then ride about four miles to a school

house near where the Josiah Friel cabin stood. The exercises would begin at about nine o'clock. There was no prayer, no singing; but she would read the Bible, talk a good deal and give good advice. The scholars would read their Bibles with her. The exercises would close at two in the afternoon. After this continuous session of five hours, Mrs. Warwick would be so exhausted as to require assistance to arise and mount her horse. It was her custom to go to William Sharp's, dine and rest a while, and then go home later in the day. To use the language of one of her scholars, the late Mrs. Elizabeth McLaughlin, who died in 1895, aged over ninety years,"She would give such good advice. If all would do as she told them how well it might have been. She was the best woman to raise girls I ever saw. She has talked to me for hours and it has often been thrown up to me that old Mrs. Warwick made me proud because I tried to do as she advised me."

The school was made up mainly pf Josiah Brown's family, John Sharp's, William Sharp's, and Jeremiah Friel's. The lamented methodist minister, Rev. James E. Moore, once belonged to her school and received from her his earliest religious instructions.

Not a great while before her death, during one of Mr. Loomis' ministerial visits, she received the communion. Upon receiving the elements, her emotions became so great that her husband and children, fearing results, carried her to her own room where for four weeks she was helpless from nervous prostration.

I wish mention here that when Jacob Warwick and his

wife returned from Bath County where they had moved and lived for a time, they built a very large new house to take the place of the log house that had been used before. One of the main reasons for having the house so spacious was that it might be used for preaching services, and there was preaching there more frequently than anywhere else in this neighborhood, during a number of years.

Chapter 6 - Section 2.

The Synod of West Virginia

In the fulfillment of the years, the work begun by the founders had advanced until three presbyteries had been erected in this western empire in which they had pioneered for God. In the earlier days, this region was under the jurisdiction of Hanover Presbytery, soon passing to the jurisdiction of Lexington Presbytery, at the time of the latter's organization in 1786. Greenbrier Presbytery was organized in 1838, and was the only presbytery in that region west of the mountains intil 1895. Kanawha Presbytery was organized in 1895, and later, in 1912, Tygart's Valley Presbytery was organized.

Thus at this time there were three presbyteries represented in the work of the Southern Presbyterian Church in West Virginia, but these Presbyteries were connected with the Sunod of Virginia. Various considerations suggested the desirability and advantage of giving separate unity to the work in West Virginia, represented by these three presbyteries. After much deliberation and not a little reluctance to sever connection with the parent Synod, so long enjoyed, definite action looking to the creation of a new Synod was taken in 1913.

Greenbrier Presbytery, meeting at Lewisburg April 29, 1913, overtured the Synod of Virginia to join with it in an overture to the General Assembly asking that a new synod embracing the presbyteries of Greenbrier, Kanawha, and Tygart's Valley, and such other sections of the state occupied by the [illegible] might wish to join the new

organization, should be erected, to be known as the Synod of West Virginia.

Tygart's Valley Presbytery took similar action at the same time, and Kanawha Presbytery followed with a like overture at its fall meeting in the same year.

These overtures were sent to the Synod of Virginia meeting at Danville, and the Synod of Virginia joined in an overture to the General Assembly of 1912. The overtures were acted upon favorably by the General Assembly and the new Synod was ordered to meet at Lewisburg October 27, 1914. Rev. Newton Donaldson of Huntington was appointed to preach the opening sermon, and Rev. Frederick H. Barron, D.D., to act as clerk until a permanent organization could be effected.

The new Synod of West Virginia met in the Old Stone Church at Lewisburg at the time appointed, and was organized. Rev. Ernest Thompson, D.D., since 1902 pastor of the First Presbyterian Church at Charleston, and one of the leading sponsors of the movement to erect the Synod of West Virginia, preached the opening sermon. Dr. Thompson was then elected Moderator and Rev. J. M. Sloan of Alderson was elected Stated Clerk. The record shows that thirty-seven ministers and twenty-seven ruling elders were enrolled at the initial meeting of the Synod of West Virginia.

Here began a new era in the history of Presbyterianism "on the western waters". The faith and labors and prayers of the pioneer fathers were visibly justified. The wilderness was becoming a fruitful field.

Emphasis should be laid on one great thought which led to the erection of the Synod of West Virginia. It was the recognition of the fact that within its territory there is a unique home mission field. And it was to give unity to that field, with all the advantages that would derive from such unity, that the Synod of West Virginia came into its being. It was erected for the purpose of meeting more effectively an opportunity in home missions which we believe is without parallel within the bounds of our Church. That was the envisioned mission of our Synod which must not be forgotten by its ministers and churches.

"The Church on the Western Waters" Courtney.

Pocahontas - 6

West Virginia Writers' Project

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